

Mr. Ford's Page



HOW much profit does a workman reap from his day's labor? How much ought he to reap? Does a "good living" come under the head of profit, or is it properly a part of the cost of producing a day's labor? How far can human energies be measured and human values standardized in order that the cost of a day's labor may be standardized?

Questions like these occur in one period or another of every man's thought about a system of economics which shall be more solidly based than any which serves us now.

But a more than academic interest attaches to these questions, for they are the real, even if unspoken, basis for much of the irritation and confusion which exists in the industrial world today.

The workman is beginning to understand that he is in business. His raw material is human energy. His product is a day's work. All other business men seek a profit above cost of production, why should not he?

The difficulty thus far has been in making out the cost sheet. How much does it cost to produce a day's work?—that is the question for which there seems to be no satisfactory basic answer.

It is perhaps possible accurately to determine—albeit with considerable interference with the day's work itself—how much energy the day's work takes out of a man. But it is not at all possible to accurately determine how much it will require to put back that energy into him against the next day's demands. Nor is it possible to determine how much of that expended energy you will never be able to put back at all—because a "sinking fund" for the replacement of the body and vital strength of a worker has never been invented.

It is possible, however, to consider these latter problems in a lump and provide for them under a form of old-age pensions; but even so, we have not thus attended to the question of profit which each day's labor ought to yield in order to take care of all of life's overhead, all physical losses, and the inevitable deterioration which falls upon all earthly things.

Moreover, there are questions having to do with the pre-productive period, which would have to be solved. Here is the man, let us say, ready to begin his service to society by turning out days' work throughout his life. How much did it cost to rear and educate him to his present age and usefulness? And how can that be figured as part of the cost of the energy he puts forth as he works today? Now, if it were the case of a machine, you would know what to charge. The machine cost a certain sum; it wears out at a given rate; it would cost such-and-such an amount to replace. It is a simple matter to figure the actual cost of the machine and its productive work, and add the profit.

Can we do that with men? Rather, can men do that for themselves, so that selling a day's work they will have as intelligent an idea of the cost of that day's work and the profit it ought to bring, as any manufacturer ought to have of his product?

THE problem becomes more complicated when you consider the man in all his aspects. For he is more than a workman who spends a certain number of hours at his work in the shop every day.

If he were only himself, the cost of his maintenance and the profit he ought to have would be a simple matter. But he is more than himself. He is a *citizen*, contributing by his cultivation and interest to the welfare of the city. He is probably a *householder*, living under conditions which represent more than mere maintenance, in that they represent the graces of social life. More than that, he is probably a *father* with a more or less numerous progeny, all of whom must subsist and be reared to usefulness on what he is able to earn.

Now, it is obvious that to regard the man alone, refusing to reckon with the home and the family in the background, is to arrive at a series of facts which are misleading and which alone can never suffice even for a temporary solution of the questions that concern us.

How are you going to figure the contribution of the home to the day's work of the man? You are paying the man for his work, but how much does that work owe to his home? How much to his

position as a citizen? How much to his position as the provider of a family? The man does the work in the shop, but his wife does the work of the home, and the shop must pay them both: on what system of figuring is the home going to find its place on the cost sheets of the day's work? It finds its place there already in a sort of haphazard way. If a man cannot support himself, his wife, his children, his habitation, his position in society—why, he doesn't stay at the job, that's all. It isn't a matter of cost and profit to him; it is the matter of a "living."

Is a man's own livelihood the "cost"? And is his ability to have a home and a family the "profit"?

Is the profit on a day's work to be computed on a cash basis only, measured by the amount a man has left over after his own and family's wants are all supplied?

Is the livelihood of five or six persons beside those of the actual worker to be charged up to "profit"?

Or, are all these relationships to be considered strictly under head of "cost," and the profit to be computed entirely outside of them? That is, after having supported himself and family, clothed them, housed them, educated them, given them the privileges incident to their standard of living, ought there to be provision made for still something more in the way of savings profit, and all properly chargeable to the day's work? These are questions which call for accurate observation and computation.

Perhaps there is no one item connected with our economic life that would surprise us more than a knowledge of just what excess burdens the day's work actually carries.

IT CARRIES all the worker's obligations outside the shop; it carries all that is necessary in the way of service and management inside the shop. The day's productive work is the most valuable mine of wealth that has ever been opened.

Certainly it cannot be made to carry less than all the worker's outside obligations. And certainly it ought to be made to take care of the worker's sunset days when labor is no longer possible to him, and should be no longer necessary. And if it is made to do even these, industry will have to be adjusted to a schedule of production, distribution and reward which will stop the leaks toward the pockets of men who do not assist production in any

way, and turn all streams for the benefit of those who do. In order to create a system which shall be as independent of the goodwill of benevolent employers as of the ill-will of selfish ones, we shall have to find a basis in the actual facts of life itself.

It costs just as much physical strength to turn out a day's work when wheat is \$1 a bushel, as when wheat is \$2.50 a bushel. Eggs may be 12 cents a dozen or 90 cents a dozen—it makes no difference in the units of energy a man uses in a productive day's work.

One would think that the real basis of value would be the cost of transmuting human energy into articles of trade and commerce. But no; that most honest of all human activities is made subject to the speculative shrewdness of men who can produce false shortages of food and other commodities, and thus excite anxiety of demand in society.

It is not in industry that the trouble lies, but in those regions beyond, where men lie in wait to seize the fruits of industry and create false scarcities for the sake of arousing an anxious demand for things which, normally, are and ought to be accessible to all who engage in daily productive pursuits.

We must begin with the land; we must continue with the day's labor; and we must keep so close, so jealously close to both these fundamentals that we shall be suspicious and fearful of all that robs the land of men, and robs labor of its primal importance in material life.

We shall think out, and try out, and establish more enduring economic systems as we go on about our work, than we shall ever be able to do sitting idle with our heads in our hands trying to "think" a new world system out of our brains.

The day's work is the hub around which the whole wheel of earth-life swings. It must be kept central, both in our thinking and our action. Any system that shunts the day's work off to one side as unimportant, is riding to a fall.

THIS article discusses the amount of profit in a day's wage. How much does it cost a man, in strength, money and ability, to produce a day's labor? How much profit ought he to receive on that outlay? How can basic figures be obtained on these matters?